Hurricane Irene heading for the US

23 August 2011 - Irene, the first hurricane of this year's North Atlantic tropical storm season, is heading for the Bahamas and is expected to move on to the United States in the next few days.

The hurricane currently has sustained wind speeds close to 100mph making it category 2 on the Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Wind Scale , and has already impacted parts of the Caribbean.

Julian Heming, Tropical Prediction Scientist for the Met Office, said: "While we have seen a lot of relatively short-lived and weak tropical storms over the North Atlantic this year, Irene is the first to develop into a hurricane.

"We expect it to pass across the Bahamas and continue to gain strength as it heads towards the US."

The Met Office is one of the key providers of hurricane forecast modelling to the National Hurricane Center based in Miami, which provides official forecasts for North Atlantic tropical storms.

Irene's expected track can be viewed on a new Met Office tool specifically designed to monitor tropical storms. Called StormTracker, it provides an interactive global picture of current storm activity to help quantify risk and aid decision making.

Matt Huddleston, Met Office Principal Consultant, said: "Backed by the latest advances in forecasting science and observations, *StormTracker* is another example of how we are making our science more accessible to the public.

"It provides information from three models, all of which are market-leading and consistently ranked among the top five in the world for dynamical forecasting on the 15-day timescale used."

StormTracker is available as a free basic version aimed at the public and advanced versions for professional risk managers.

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Last updated: 23 August 2011